

THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS 17 MAY 1910

NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM
401 F STREET, N.W., SUITE 312
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001-2728

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4 October 2004

Dear Secretary England:

During its meeting of 21 September 2004, the Commission reviewed a proposal to increase perimeter security at the North and South gates of the Potomac Annex located at 23rd and E Streets, NW. As you know, the Potomac Annex is in the long shadow of the Lincoln Memorial and is visually connected to the western portion of the National Mall and the Kennedy Center. It is the home of the Old Naval Observatory, a National Historic Landmark. In addition, the Annex's two gates directly face the main headquarters building of the United States Department of State across 23rd Street, a heavily-trafficked route into downtown Washington. The members found the proposal to be outside of the vocabulary of the city, presenting a siege-like condition of multiple delta barriers and prison-like pedestrian turnstiles. The Commission thought the delta barriers and circular turnstiles were not appropriate or acceptable and did not approve the proposal as submitted.

We ask you to recognize the special condition and context of the site and recommend you look at other acceptable security measures used throughout the city. The State Department uses retractable bollards that are less visually intrusive than Delta barriers but still provide the high level of security they require. Perhaps similar bollards could be used at the Annex's two gates. For pedestrian access control, the White House is the model to emulate where simple electronically-controlled double gates provide access control. The Potomac Annex is a historic and a highly prominent site and, as such, is one of the areas where the DOD standards for security barriers used elsewhere throughout the country should be reconsidered. The goal is to protect the installation, but without it appearing to be an excessively fortified facility.

The one item that the members thought would be an improvement was the replacement of the chain-link fence with a decorative metal fence matching the existing metal fence found elsewhere on the Annex's perimeter.

We look forward to further review of more acceptable options in the near future. As always, the staff is available to assist you and the design team.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David M. Childs", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David M. Childs
Chairman

The Honorable Gordon R. England
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-1000

cc: Captain Thomas Calhoun, CEC, USN
Melissa Devnich, Project Manager